



prayer

LIVING STONES CHURCH

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This document is a brief, group-oriented exploration of the doctrine of prayer.

In Mark 13:37, Jesus says to His disciples, *"And what I say to you [disciples] I say to all: Stay awake."*

Jesus said these words right before His death as a way to point His disciples toward a prayerful, expectant attentiveness to Him and His priorities. Discipleship is, in a way, all about "staying awake". In fact, Paul tells us the same thing in 1 Thessalonians: *"So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober."*

The basic idea here is that Jesus is alive and reigning, but we still live in a world broken by sin, with bodies broken by sin, and an enemy who desires to ruin us and break our hope in God. Which means that following Jesus can be difficult. Discipleship is often hard. Yet we have the unfathomable privilege and invitation to be heard by the Almighty, to be welcomed into His presence and freed from the burdens of our sin, worries, and wayward desires.

Prayer is one of the ways God helps us stay awake as disciples.

Week One

BIBLICAL PRAYER

GROUP INTRO

If you had one word to describe your own prayer life, what word would you use? Why?

What would you hope to be changed by a study of prayer?

Read aloud the following quote from R.C. Sproul:

"The chief rule of prayer is to remember who God is and to remember who you are."

REMEMBERING WHO GOD IS

1. Read Nehemiah 9:6-8 and Nehemiah 9:16-21. How do these passages describe God?

Leader help: God is the Creator of all things, the preserver of all things (which means He is involved in creation), covenantal (He pursued Abraham with a covenant), faithful, righteous, forgiving, gracious, merciful, patient, abounding in steadfast love, generous, and attentive to the needs of His people.

2. What actions of God are described in Nehemiah 9? What do His actions tell us about Him?

Leader help: God created, preserves, chose, makes covenant, keeps promises, commands, guides, generously gives and provides. All of these actions show that God is primarily a giver.

3. Read Matthew 11:25-30. How does this Jesus describe the Father? How does Jesus describe Himself?

Leader help: to Jesus, God is Father, Lord, sovereign, revealing, and omnipotent [all-powerful] (since He can “hand over” all things to Jesus)

Jesus describes Himself with two simple words: “gentle” and “lowly”

4. What impact upon His disciples does Jesus say He will have when they come to Him?

Leader help: the promise is that He will give rest, and disciples will experience rest

REMEMBERING WHO YOU ARE

1. Read Matthew 6:1, 5-8. What do you notice about Jesus' expectations for the prayer of His disciples?

Leader help: notice the word “when”. Jesus expects and invites His disciples to pray, so when we find ourselves not praying, we aren't acting in line with our status as His disciples.

2. Read Romans 8:5 and Galatians 4:6. According to these passages, if you have trusted Jesus, what is your primary identity? As a Christian, what hinders your trust that God is your Father and you are His child?

3. Read Genesis 1:27. Identifying the fact that we are created helps us know that our limitations are good, and resting is absolutely necessary. Go back to Matthew 11:25-30. What kind of rest do you need from Jesus as you start 2022? (i.e. rest from worrying, rest from self-righteous striving, rest from greediness, etc.).
4. Read John 10:7-18. Christians belong to Jesus as His sheep. How will knowing Jesus as your Shepherd and yourself as His sheep help you “stay awake” throughout 2022?

PRACTICING PRAYER

Theologian Donald Whitney suggests that there are two common problems that keep Christians from an in-depth prayer life:

(1) Lack of discipline and (2) Saying “the same old things about the same old things” in prayer (i.e. we make prayer boring by repeating prayers in the same words so often). As a way forward, do the following exercise as a group:

Set a Schedule for Prayer

Decide times you will dedicate to prayer every week. Stick to it. Recognize that you have an enemy who will attempt to distract you or deter you from prayer, or guilt you when you miss a day.

But stay the course with your community. Develop a plan to hold one another accountable in 2022 to regularly pray.

Pray the Bible

We don't have to come up with new things to say to God and fall into the "same old, same old" trap. We can instead pray the Bible. Donald Whitney suggests starting to pray the Bible by praying the Psalms. Here's his example:

"We can turn to Psalm 23, where the first verse states, 'The LORD is my shepherd.'" In order to pray this verse, one might pray things like, 'Lord, I thank You that You are my shepherd. You are a good shepherd. Would you shepherd me in the decision before me today?'"¹

Choose either Nehemiah 9:6-8 or Matthew 11:25-30 and pray through the passage together.

¹ From the ESV Prayer Bible, Introduction.

Week Two

COMMUNAL PRAYER

GROUP INTRO

Last week we discussed and developed a prayer strategy. How has prayer been in the last week? What struggles to stay consistent in prayer do you face? How can we as a group help you stay faithful to prayer?

REMEMBERING WHO GOD IS

1. From the beginning, God has been redeeming people in order to bring them into relationship with Himself and with others. This means that prayer is essential to not just individuals, but to gathered Christians. Read aloud Matthew 6:9-13. What essential truths about God and about prayer in general do we gather from this passage? Is prayer meant to only be individual and private? Why or why not?

Leader help: God is not distant, but relationally near to His people, so near He is Father. He is also a King with a kingdom, a generous provider, a protector, and one from whom we need forgiveness.

We learn from a careful reading of this prayer that God is “our” Father who gives “us” “our” daily bread...in other words, we don’t just belong to God and pray to God by ourselves, we belong to one another and pray together.

2. Looking at Matthew 6:9-13, what basic needs of the church does Jesus highlight?

Leader help: through this prayer, Jesus shows that our souls need a right view of God, we need Him to rule over us in His ways, we need His provision and protection, and we need His forgiveness.

3. Why is it significant that Christians can address God as “Father in heaven”?

Leader help: first, we are sinners, so the fact that God loves us as His children shows His grace. Second, we are not just acquainted with other Christians, but related to them, and we will forever be family. Third, this shows that the invitation to belong to God and His people isn't only for Israel, but for all those who respond to the call to trust in Jesus alone.

REMEMBERING WHO YOU ARE

1. If Matthew 6:9-13 is prayed not just “word for word”, but is applied in a personal manner as we gather with other Christians, we'll have to humble ourselves and admit sins, needs, and even wounds to others. Why does Jesus call for this depth of humility in prayer?

Leader help: As 1 Peter reminds us, God will exalt those who humble themselves in God's presence. As saints who still sin and live in a broken world, we need the healing, grace, and support that can only come when we humble ourselves and admit our needs not just to God but to others. Jesus is interested in doing what is best for us, and helping us get closer to Him and others.

2. What have you personally learned and gained by praying in community?
3. Why is praying with other Christians beneficial for those who have trusted Jesus?
4. Do you find praying with others difficult or easy? Why? How might we as a group help one another pray together?

PRACTICING PRAYER

Take some time to pray the following Bible passage together, stopping where there are gaps in the passage. Be sure to personalize and apply this passage to your unique situation, or the situations of loved ones.

As a note, if you're an extrovert, be sure to watch how long you're praying so that others have a chance to pray. If you're an introvert, remember that you are with brothers and sisters, and your true audience is your Father in heaven.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,

and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Amen.

Week Three

FRONTLINE PRAYER

GROUP INTRO

Briefly share a story about a time when you approached God with a profound sense of His power, holiness, or greatness. What caused you to sense this about God? How did you feel?

REMEMBERING WHO GOD IS

1. Read aloud Psalm 72:18-19; Isaiah 6:1-5; and Revelation 4:8-11. How is God described in these passages? How do these descriptions differentiate God from everyone and everything else?

Leader help: there are some crucial characteristics of God highlighted in these passages. It would be easy to skip ahead, but take some time to slowly and seriously consider how God is being described: a holy, glorious, powerful, personal, and eternal King. God is both utterly holy and separate from creation and personally involved, so personally involved that He has a name that He has revealed to His creatures, and He is known as the God and King of a specific people.

2. Read aloud Hebrews 4:14-16. How does this passage describe Jesus? What has Jesus done and why did He do it? Contrast this passage with the passages above.

Leader help: Jesus is the great high priest, who alone has come down from the dwelling place of God to atone for the sins of His people. He is the only Son of God, and He is the only One who can bring us into the very presence of God the King, who sits on a throne that's described here as a throne of grace. Jesus perfectly lived on behalf of His people so that we can "receive mercy and find grace to help."

REMEMBERING WHO YOU ARE

1. Using only 1-2 words, how would you summarize the human response to God in the passages listed in Question 1 above? Why do these responses matter?

Ideas for summaries include:

Psalm 72: Adoration, Worship, Awe, Celebration, Allegiance

Isaiah 6: Conviction, Dread, Awe, Humility, Repentance (just a few verses later, after his sin is atoned for, Isaiah's response is a readiness for mission)

Revelation 4: Adoration, Awe, Worship, Praise, Surrender, Commitment, Wonder

These responses show us what we can expect if we are truly recognizing who God is and what He is like, and can be motivation to get deeper into the Bible to know God better if we aren't responding to God in similar ways.

2. Do you find yourself responding to God in a way similar to any of your answers from above? Why or why not?

PRACTICING PRAYER

In his book *Center Church*, author Timothy Keller describes three traits of "extraordinary prayers" or "Frontline Prayers":

1. A request for grace to confess sins and to humble ourselves.
2. A compassion and zeal for the flourishing of the church and the reaching of the lost.
3. A yearning to know God, to see His face, to glimpse His glory.

Spend a significant portion of time praying through each "Frontline Prayer". Pray for yourself, group, the church, and the world around you.

Appendix 1

PRAY THE NEW TESTAMENT'S PRAYERS²

Throughout the New Testament we have numerous prayers that we can adopt in our own prayer lives. Below is a small sampling of these prayers. We encourage you to pray these for yourself, your church, and your city.

Ephesians 1:15-23

15 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, 16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

² The following content comes from *How to Build a Healthy Church* by Mark Dever and Paul Alexander.

Ephesians 3:14-21

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Philippians 1:9-11

9 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Colossians 1:9-12

9 And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

11 To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, 12 so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Appendix 2

PRAYERS FOR ELDER MEETINGS

Below are ideas for elders to pray with one another during elder meetings as they seek to lead God's people.

Pray that we would preserve our unity even in our diversity.

Pray for local revival of godly sorrow, conviction, and spiritual interest in the Bible.

Pray that God would create a new local appetite for expositional preaching of the Bible.

Pray for good fruit from the regular preaching of the Bible.

Pray that all members would look out for each other's interests.

Pray that the elders would equip the saints for the work of ministry.

Pray that members would be faithful to make disciples, build a culture of discipleship, and see disciple making as part of their life as a Christian.

Pray for growth in the church's ability to counsel and care for one another from Scripture.

Pray that established members would be hospitable to newer members, visitors, and those different from themselves.

Pray for growth in personal holiness, love, and faith.

Pray for Christ to be honored in our work and that we would commend the gospel to others in our words and conduct during the week.

Pray for growing maturity in giving and receiving godly criticism and encouragement.

Pray for growing faithfulness and fruitfulness in private Bible reading.